Oxford House -- What is it and how do I find out more about it?

Oxford House provides houseing in a supportive environment for over 100 recovering homeless or near homeless individuals. It relies upon self-government and self-support. Members of a house elect officers and throw anyone out who uses alcohol or drugs and who does not pay his or her fair share of the costs of the house. Oxford House does not own property; it rents it just as many families do. The people in that house have a common bond of being individuals who are recovering from alcoholism or drug addiction and have a desire to stay sober and straight.

Oxford House stated in 1975 with its first house in Silver Spring, Maryland. There are now 11 houses in the Washington, D.C. area-- nine for men and two for women. Each Oxford House has a charter from Oxford House, Inc., a non-profit umbrella organization which assures the quality control of the concept. While each house is autonomous and must be self-supporting and maintain the rule that its members do not use alcohol or drugs, the failure to do so can result in Oxford House, Inc. revoking its charter. Once, in 1978, Oxford House, Inc. was required to do that and the method used was to replace the members of an existing Oxford House with new members. With that exception each Oxford House has always maintained sobriety and its financial responsibility.

The demand for space in every Oxford House is much greater than the supply of beds. For example, no one involved with Oxford House in the Washington, D.C. area doubts that three times as many houses could be filled immediately. In the first two weeks in December, for example, there were over 100 eligible applicants for membership in the various D.C. Oxford Houses and only one vacancy.

The theory behind the Oxford House concept is that Oxford House should always be expanding to meet the need because once an individual can live in the Oxford House as long as he or she wants provided that the individual does not drink or use drugs and pays his or her equal share of the costs. The reason for this theory is two-fold. First, not everyone can stay sober or straight living alone. Second, "old-timers" bring stability to the Oxford House concept of self-management.

Unfortunately, it takes longer and longer for the existing houses to raise the money internally which is necessary to open a new house. Seed money is needed in order to bring the supply of beds in line with the demand. It takes about $5,000 to get a new house started -- most of which goes to the first month's rent and a security deposit equal to one month's rent. In addition rapid expansion of Oxford House will require more coordination by Oxford House, Inc. in finding suitable houses, filling them and helping the new members of each new house learn the Oxford House system. One full time individual can act as that coordinator using a single office and telephone and access to a small truck to collect beds, furniture , and linens-- all of which are readily available via donations.

Further information concerning Oxford House can be obtained from any Oxford House or either of the founding members listed below:

J. Paul Molloy — Tel. 587-2916

or

John V. O'Neill — Tel. 933-6251